

*Crisis for New England Families Approaches As Heating Oil Prices, Demand for Help Remain High*

WASHINGTON – As the country continues to slowly recover from the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression and unrest abroad has resulted in increasingly high oil prices, a crisis in the price of heating oil is brewing among low-income households throughout the region. In response to this looming threat, and to the continued under-funding of energy assistance programs, **Reps. John B. Larson (CT-01) and Rosa DeLauro (CT-03)** yesterday introduced H.R. 4026, the Energy Assistance for American Families Act, which would increase the level of funding for and expand availability to the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, or LIHEAP, expanding a vital safety net for thousands of Connecticut homes and millions of American families.

Joined by fellow New England members of Congress **Ed Markey (MA-07) and Peter Welch (VT-AL)**, the lawmakers announced the bill today at a press conference outside the Capitol.

“Despite the unseasonably warm weather, budget cuts to LIHEAP could still leave many Connecticut residents out in the cold this winter,” Larson said. “For millions of Americans nationwide programs like LIHEAP are critical in helping families make it through the winter. My office was recently contacted by ‘Susan’ – a 75-year-old veteran’s widow from Granby who was emailing us from her 54 degree home because her heat allowance was dropped from \$605 to \$175 this year. At a time when so many Americans like Susan are suffering, it is an outrage that Republicans continue to cut funding for LIHEAP while providing unnecessary tax breaks to big oil companies. I hope that members of both parties see the necessity of programs like these and come together to pass this bill.”

“With 8.3% unemployment and one in six in poverty, millions of people are really struggling all over this country. Connecticut has been particularly hard-hit, along with the rest of the Northeast states-- we have some of the coldest winters in America, and are more reliant on heating oil than any other part of the country. The massive cuts to the LIHEAP program in recent years are forcing families to have to make extraordinarily tough choices. No one should have to choose between buying groceries or keeping their homes warm,” said Congresswoman DeLauro. “The Energy Assistance for American Families Act will continue the vital LIHEAP program, increase funding levels, and help to increase access for families in need.”

A copy of the legislation can be found [HERE](#) .

The Energy Assistance for American Families Act would increase the authorized funding level for LIHEAP to \$7.6 billion per year for fiscal years 2013 to 2016, an increase of \$2.5 billion over the last authorized level, enacted in 2005. The bill would also extend the expanded eligibility levels that were included in the omnibus appropriations bills for fiscal years 2009 and 2010 – giving states the option of helping families with incomes up to 75 percent of the state median income level. Overall demand for LIHEAP support is rising, in large part due to the economic downturn. Increasing the LIHEAP funding level will allow states to meet this increased demand and continue to provide meaningful aid.

According to the National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA), states assisted 8.9 million households through LIHEAP last year – a 54 percent increase in the number of households served in 2008. Energy prices are also on the rise, with the average household expenditures on heating oil this winter expected to increase to \$2,326 from \$1,801 in 2008-2009.

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